

Illinois Pure Aluminum Company
109 Holmes Street
Lemont
Cook County
Illinois

HAER No. IL-45

HAER
ILL
16-LEMO,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Location: 109 Holmes Street
Lemont, Cook County, Illinois

Date of Construction: 1892; ca. 1948

Builder: Unknown

Present Owner: Unknown

Significance: Demolished in the late 1980s, the Illinois Pure Aluminum Company's factory in Lemont was one of the nation's earliest aluminum cookware producers in the nation.

Project Information: The Illinois and Michigan Canal was designated a National Heritage Corridor in 1984. The following year HABS/HAER embarked on an extensive inventory and documentation project of the 100 mile-long corridor. Field work for this project was concluded in 1988. Final editing of the documentation was completed in 1992.

Historians: Gray Fitzsimons, 1985.

In 1892 the Illinois Pure Aluminum (IPA) Company was founded in Lemont, the southernmost city in Cook County. Served by the Chicago & Alton and Santa Fe railroads, Lemont had gained a reputation in the late-nineteenth century as a limestone quarrying center. The city's workforce included Irish, Italians, Poles, and native-born Americans. The founders of IPA, including English immigrant and Lemont resident Edwin Walker, believed their enterprise would succeed in Lemont because of its inexpensive labor costs and excellent rail transportation. Following its establishment the company quickly developed a market for its line of aluminum products which included cookware, combs, thimbles, hairpins, and road signs. Shortly after IPA began operations George S. Walker, the son of Edwin Walker, became the company president. IPA remained a family-owned business throughout its lifetime.

The original factory building was a two-story structure with ashlar limestone walls extending to the first floor, and common-bond red-brick walls extending to the roof. The gable roof was supported by wood rafters. A heavy wood floor was supported internally on timber posts and beams. Most of the deep-draw metal presses (manufactured by the E. W. Bliss Company of Brooklyn, New York) used in forming the aluminum pots and pans, were located in the basement. The finishing and warehousing departments were located on the upper two floors.

Despite the success of its cookware, marketed nationally as "Walker Ware," the Walker family continued to operate the factory on a relatively small scale. IPA appears to have hired no more than sixty to 100 workers during its peak years. The factory building was significantly expanded only one time, this occurring about 1948, when additions were constructed to the south and west of the original factory. IPA ceased operations in the 1970s and the Walker family's property fell into the hands of a receiver. The factory was demolished in the late 1980s.

SOURCES:

Lemont Weekly Observer, vol. 2, March 23, 1894.

Lemont Observer, January 16, 1897 and July 20, 1897.

Lemont, Illinois: Its History in Commemoration of the Centennial of Its Incorporation, reprinted edition, (Lemont, Illinois: Lemont Area Historical Society, 1984), 184-85.